

Maine’s PreK-12 Testing Program: Frequently Asked Questions Updated 10/28/2021

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Program Value

1. Why are we testing now? Why didn’t we do this in the fall of 2020?

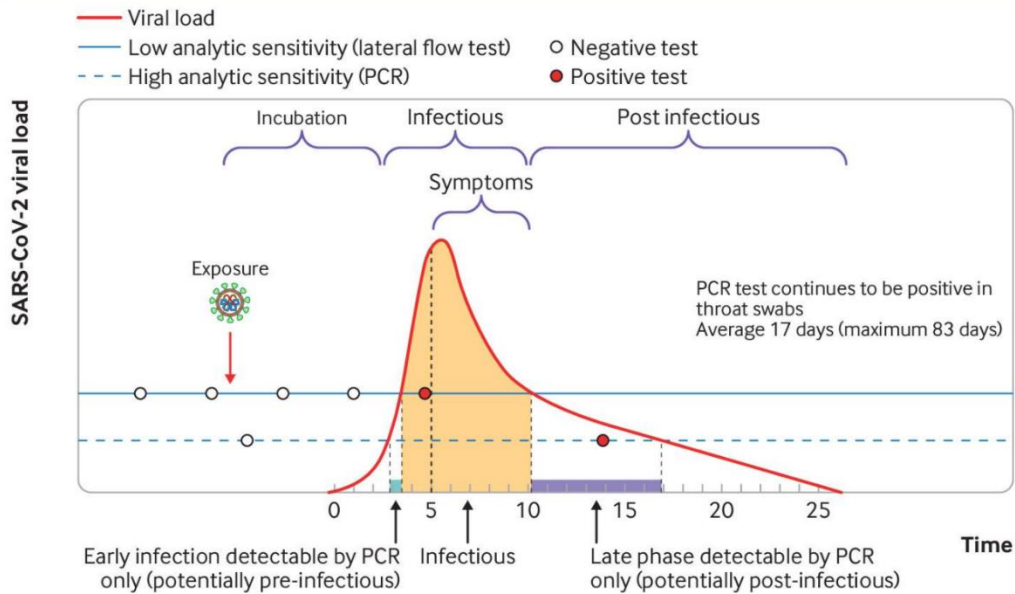
In the fall of 2020, we knew less about school testing programs and efficacy. Since that time, states across the country have piloted school-based testing models, including pooled PCR testing and BinaxNOW. Massachusetts rolled out a state-wide pooled PCR testing program in March of 2021, and we are now seeing some early research and articles from that work ([Value of COVID-19 Testing](#)). Funding was also an issue. Additionally, states had no funding to support school testing prior to March of 2021, when the early K-12 testing pilots demonstrated the value of testing with the [K-12 National Testing Action Program](#). More information on testing in schools and the impact of COVID-19 on schools and children can be found here: [Rockefeller Foundation](#)

2. What are the benefits of screening testing when children are now being vaccinated?

Pooled PCR testing can be viewed as another tool, along with masking, handwashing, and isolating symptomatic individuals, to keep communities safe, reduce transmission, and build confidence that it’s safe to go to school.

- Children who are exposed to COVID-19 at school who are participating in pooled testing can stay in school as long as they test negative and remain asymptomatic, and they do not have to quarantine from school-based activities
- Parents can go to work rather than stay home with quarantined children
- School staff exposed at school can continue their incredibly important work of educating students
- Builds confidence in knowing the level of transmission in school
- Allows the school to be knowledgeable of and ready for COVID-19 surges

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Program Eligibility

3. How do we apply to be part of the pooled testing program?

School Administrative Units (SAUs), as well as approved special education schools, and private schools should submit an [Authorized School Application](#) to be included in the pooled testing program. Once application materials are submitted, Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and Department of Education (DOE) will connect the unit or school with the testing service provider. DHHS and DOE will review applications on a rolling basis. More information about the application can be found on the Pooled Testing section of the [DOE COVID-19 Toolkit](#).

4. Which schools are eligible for this program?

SAUs or private schools providing any type of in-person instruction, including Career and Technical programs (CTE) such as full-in person or hybrid instructional models or in-person services for high needs students, can participate in this initiative. In addition, SAUs and private schools that are currently in a remote instructional model but intend to use this program as an opportunity to return to in-person learning are also invited to participate. Public schools that offer PreK programs may include that population in the testing program. K-12 private schools are also able to participate in the program; however, private PreK programs are not currently able to participate. There is no minimum number of participants required at a school site.

5. Does the entire SAU or Private school need to participate?

SAUs and private schools are strongly encouraged to involve all students and staff in pooled testing, excluding any individuals who may opt out. However, SAUs and private schools may choose to launch this program with a smaller subset of schools, grades, students, or staff and scale up to a school-wide or unit-wide model at a future date. If SAUs and private schools choose to only involve staff in a pool, however, they are limited to a maximum of 5 individual staff samples per pool and must have BinaxNOW tests available for immediate Follow Up Testing.

6. If an SAU or private school is not signed up for Abbot BinaxNOW, can they still participate?

Abbott BinaxNOW is required for follow-up testing on the individuals within positive pools and is a core component of the program. The state will cover the costs associated with using Abbott BinaxNOW for follow-up testing, including providing the tests to administer, the platform for reporting, and clinical and/or administrative support needed to

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administer the tests. SAUs not currently using Abbott BinaxNOW can obtain tests by following the guidance document and taking necessary steps required, including securing a CLIA Waiver, completing the online training modules and enrolling in REDCap, the online reporting platform. [DOE BinaxNOW Information](#).

7. What staff are eligible to participate in the pooled testing program?

All SAU and private school employees or individuals employed by the organization are eligible to participate in the pooled testing program, including those that may already be vaccinated. Additionally, contracted staff such as bus drivers, are also eligible for participation. At this time, staff that work outside of the school are not eligible to participate.

8. Can staff and students be required to participate in pooled testing?

No. Participation in pooled testing is voluntary. Students who do not participate cannot be barred from in-person learning opportunities solely because they do not participate, however those not participating in the program who are identified as close contacts must quarantine and be out of school for that period of time.

9. If we have a SAU-run PreK program, are we able to include our PreK teachers and students in pooled testing?

Yes. All public-school staff and students, including public PreK teachers and students, can be included.

10. What staff are eligible to participate in the pooled testing program?

All SAU and private school employees or individuals employed by the organization are eligible to participate in the pooled testing program, including those that may already be vaccinated. Additionally, contracted staff such as bus drivers, are also eligible for participation. At this time, staff that work outside of the school are not eligible to participate.

11. Should vaccinated staff participate in pooled testing?

We encourage teachers and staff to participate in the testing even if they have already been fully vaccinated, though it is not required. There are several reasons why vaccinated staff should participate in pooled testing, including:

- While each vaccine authorized by the FDA is effective at preventing symptomatic infection, no vaccine is 100% effective. Vaccinated individuals may still get COVID-19 and transmit it to others.
- Evidence suggests that fully vaccinated people are less likely to have asymptomatic infection and potentially less likely to transmit SARS-CoV-2 to others, but further investigation is ongoing.
- Teachers can model good practices for students to encourage participation.

12. Does an SAU or Private school need to have an electronic health record system to participate?

No, an SAU or private school does not need to have an electronic health record system to participate. The Pooled Testing Provider will provide all necessary technology platforms for Pooled PCR Testing and the state will provide access to REDCap to report all BinaxNOW Follow-Up Testing.

Program Costs and Vendors

13. Will the state cover courier costs?

Yes. Funding will cover pooled testing processing services (e.g., test kits), transportation (e.g., courier and shipping costs), and additional logistical supports (e.g., specimen collection and site administration).

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14. Is there funding available to cover the administration and record keeping associated with testing, or is funding just to pay for testing of pooled samples?

Funding does not currently cover pooled testing administration and record keeping by a school/unit employee. Funding from DHHS for pooled testing covers three areas:

- Onsite specimen collection and testing coordination support: Staff contracted through the vendor to assist with implementation, on-the-ground operations, and/or specimen collection (if requested and available).
- Pooled testing processing services: test kits for pooled testing, vendor administrative fees, and BinaxNOW follow-up tests.
- Specimen transportation: either courier or shipping from test collection site (e.g., school) to laboratory.

Pooled Testing Implementation & Operations

15. How will training be conducted?

The Pooled Testing Provider will provide training to staff to administer tests as well as how to observe sample collection. This training will also include information on how to track samples in each pool, use the software, and deliver samples to the laboratory.

16. Should SAUs and Private schools participating in Maine's pooled testing program provide accommodations for students with disabilities who opt-in to the program?

Yes. SAUs and private schools participating in the pooled testing program must ensure that students with disabilities are provided an equal opportunity to participate in a pool, and to benefit from the services offered. Some of these students will need accommodations to participate effectively in the testing program. Participating SAUs and private schools must ensure that personnel responsible for implementation of the on-site testing are provided training necessary to accommodate students with disabilities. They should work with the pooled service testing provider to provide social stories, video preparation, visual aids, imitative models, scripts, desensitization, appropriate reinforcers, administration of the test with a staff member familiar with the student, and/or other accommodations and supports necessary to ensure equitable opportunities to participate. Parents/guardians of students with disabilities, as with all students, should be informed that they may opt-out of the voluntary testing program for any reason, or revoke consent at any time.

17. Do individuals in a positive pool need to quarantine while they are waiting for individual-level results to return?

No. Students who are part of a positive pool do not need to quarantine while they await their follow-up test results unless they are symptomatic. It is possible that individuals that had COVID-19 (knowingly or unknowingly) but are no longer contagious, will cause some pooled tests to come back positive, and every test has a chance of false positives. Symptomatic students should not attend school and follow the school's procedure. If not symptomatic, individuals in a positive pool will return to school for follow-up testing. Individuals who receive positive follow-up individual test results will need to be isolated as defined in the Standard Operating Procedure [Investigating Positive Cases for COVID-19 in Schools](#).

18. How many staff are needed to carry out the collection and processing of pooled testing?

In most cases, DHHS expects that pooled testing can be conducted with existing staff, although pooled testing providers are able to coordinate additional staff to help implement the program and collect samples as part of Level II services (funded by the state, if needed and available). SAUs and private schools are welcome to collaborate with neighboring schools to share services or coordinate specific tasks. If additional staff are requested, this may delay the start of pool testing in an SAU or private school.

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19. What test pool sizes, composition, and frequency are recommended?

Appropriate pool size should be determined by several factors including vendor and community/school prevalence. Because the cost and logistical advantages of pooled testing are dependent upon a relatively low portion of pools being positive, schools in communities with high prevalence, such as schools in counties categorized as yellow or red, or schools who are seeing a high share of positive pools in previous weeks, should lower their pool size to 10 or fewer. The pool size should not be lower than 5.

It is highly recommended for health, as well as administrative reasons, that "membership" within a given pool remain as constant as possible. Teachers, where possible, should be pooled with their students (as a positive pooled result on a pool full of teachers may cause staffing issues while all teachers in the pool are individually re-tested). If SAUs or schools choose to only involve staff in a pool, however, they are limited to a maximum of 5 tests per pool and must have BinaxNOW tests available for immediate follow up testing. Pool testing should be done on individuals once per week.

20. What is needed to transport tests to the lab?

Samples are transported by FedEx to the laboratory for processing. In instances where FedEx cannot meet the required shipping timeline, a courier will be arranged to transport the samples to the laboratory. There is no risk in transmission while transporting test samples as all samples are sealed. There are no complex requirements for transportation, such as refrigeration.

21. How long will it take to receive pooled test results?

In almost all cases, it will take 24-48 hours to received pooled test results. As a reminder, staff and students do not need to quarantine while awaiting pooled test results and should be in school unless they become symptomatic

Positive Pool Questions:

22. What if I can't conduct follow up testing on every member of a Positive pool?

In the event that not all members of a positive pool are able to receive follow up BinaxNOW tests (e.g. some are on vacation or otherwise absent), schools should proceed with normal follow-up testing protocol with the members of the positive pool that are present. If follow up testing with the BinaxNOW does not identify a positive from among the pool members available, all available members of that pool must be re-tested with a second BinaxNOW no sooner than the next day, but within 2 days. As in other cases, it is not necessary to quarantine/isolate until an individual has received a positive individual test result. Members of a positive pool who are not immediately available for follow up testing with the rest of their pool should receive follow up testing per normal protocol as soon as it is possible to do so, or alternatively the individual(s) can pursue COVID-19 testing independently and relay test results to the school. A school can accept a negative result as adequate follow up testing.

23. Do individuals in a positive pool need to quarantine while they are waiting for individual-level results to return?

No. Students who are part of a positive pool do not need to quarantine while they await their follow-up test results unless they are symptomatic. It is possible that individuals that had COVID-19 (knowingly or unknowingly) but are no longer contagious will cause some pooled tests to come back positive, and every test has a chance of false positives. Symptomatic students should not attend school and follow the school's procedure. If not symptomatic, individuals in a positive pool will return to school for follow-up testing. Individuals who receive positive follow-up individual test results will need to be isolated as defined in the Standard Operating Procedure [Investigating Positive Cases for COVID-19 in Schools](#).

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24. For a COVID-19 positive individual, should the pooled test or follow-up test be used to determine the start of the infectious period?

If an asymptomatic individual tests positive for COVID-19 the infectious period is considered to begin 2 days prior to the collection of their individual positive test. The date of the follow up test, when part of pooled testing, should be used to determine the infectious period and the beginning of their isolation period.

25. What follow-up test options exist for students or staff who live far away from school?

If a student or staff member is in a positive pool, they should return to school as normal to receive follow-up testing. These individuals do not have to quarantine and can ride on buses or take their normal transportation method to school if they are not symptomatic. Symptomatic individuals should follow the guidance outlined in the [Standard Operating Procedure Investigating Positive Cases for COVID-19 in Schools](#). The hope is that this will largely eliminate any difficulties or costs associated with individuals being out of school when a positive pool is identified, as Follow-Up Testing results can be immediately delivered with Abbott BinaxNOW testing.

BinaxNOW Testing:

26. Who administers the Abbott BinaxNOW tests and Pooled Tests?

The Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) received for the Abbott BinaxNOW test allows it to be administered by a variety of trained professionals, including, though not limited to, school nurses. All staff administering Abbott BinaxNOW test kits within a school or unit must complete all Abbott BinaxNOW training modules.

Similarly, pooled testing is administered at the school level either by trained school staff, including, though not limited to, school nurses, or onsite test specimen collectors. For staff and for students in grades 2 and up, the test may be conducted by self-collection and observed by trained staff. There are instances of children younger than second grade who are able to self-collect; however, this is following a period of instruction and hand-over-hand guidance. The Pooled Testing Services Providers will provide the training for staff administering or observing specimen collection.

27. Who should provide the standing order for Abbott BinaxNOW Follow-Up Testing in schools?

A provider standing order is required for individual Abbott BinaxNOW testing, and any follow up PCR tests administered onsite. There is a Standing Order from Maine DHHS that was last updated on June 29, 2021. [Read the Standing Order \(PDF\)](#). The DHHS Standing Order is not meant to replace existing patient-provider relationships or provider-laboratory.

28. Can BinaxNOW tests be run outside?

BinaxNOW tests cannot be accurately run if the swab or kit is outside of the 59-86-degree range (Fahrenheit). However, the swab can be gathered in colder or warmer temperatures and run once the parts of the test are within that temperature range. When ordering BinaxNOW tests, SAUs and private schools may order additional vials to transport swabs that are collected outside of the temperature range.

CLIA Waiver

29. Is there a statewide CLIA waiver to cover Abbott BinaxNOW testing in the K-12 environment?

No. However, schools and SAUs are now eligible to apply for a CLIA Certificate of Waiver. To obtain a CLIA Certificate of Waiver, organizations must complete an application ([CLIA Waiver Application Form](#)) and upon approval will be invoiced a \$180 fee. More information on applying for a CLIA Certificate is available on the [CMS CLIA website](#) or refer to the [DOE CLIA Waiver Instructions](#).

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30. Do you have to reapply for the CLIA waiver if you’ve already gotten a waiver and have been approved for BinaxNOW?

No. If you have already applied for a CLIA waiver, you do not have to reapply. A CLIA waiver is valid for two calendar years.

Personal Protective Equipment

31. What PPE is required for staff administering or observing tests?

Anterior nasal swabs are not considered to be aerosol generating procedures, but PPE is recommended for people administering or observing the tests simply because they have to be so close to the individual being tested. All staff administering pooled testing must wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) when conducting tests and handling patient specimens. When collecting a specimen from another individual, the following PPE is required: Surgical mask or N95 mask, eye protection, gloves, gown. For personnel observing the self-administration of specimen collection, the following PPE is required: Surgical mask, gloves, if collecting sealed tubes.

<u>Administering pooled testing</u>	<u>Observing self-administered pooled testing</u>
<i>Surgical/N95 mask</i>	<i>Surgical Mask</i>
<i>Gloves</i>	<i>Gloves if collecting sealed tubes</i>
<i>Eye protection</i>	
<i>Gown</i>	

32. Can DHHS provide or facilitate N95 respirator fit testing for school nurses?

Annual fit testing is a routine part of using N95 respirators and can be performed by many occupational health providers. During the public health emergency, and with the wide variety of N95 respirators in use, it is not always possible to perform fit testing. Nurses and health care staff are encouraged to conduct a user seal check to determine if the respirator is being properly worn and should be performed with each use. The user seal check procedure is described here: <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2018-130/pdfs/2018-130.pdf>

Pooled PCR Program Validity

33. Is the Abbott BinaxNOW accurate enough to be used as a follow up to the pooled test, especially for asymptomatic children?

Yes. The Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (ME CDC) endorses its use in follow-up testing. No test is 100% accurate. BinaxNOW tests are effective at picking up those individuals with high viral loads (assumed to be most infectious) and are adequate for this purpose. Anyone who develops symptoms consistent with COVID-19 should get tested, even if they have recently received a negative result.

34. Is pooled testing an effective strategy in areas where COVID prevalence is high?

Yes. Pooled testing is an effective tool to identify positive cases without the logistical and financial burden of regular individual testing. In communities with high COVID prevalence, which is defined for schools in Maine as color coded yellow or red, it is strongly suggested that SAUs and private schools start with pools smaller than 10 to minimize the number of positive pools returned.

35. Is pooled testing an effective strategy in areas with low transmission rates?

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Yes. Pooled testing is an effective strategy in areas with low transmission. With lower COVID-19 rates, there may be fewer follow-up tests. This can increase staff and community confidence in returning to school while incurring much lower costs than individual testing.

36. How has the state reviewed the laboratories used in the Pooled Testing Program?

All laboratories allowed to process samples under the state-contracted Pooled Testing Providers have undergone a technical review of their pooling strategy and supplementary data by the ME CDC, DHHS, and DOE.

37. Does the state allow different standards for test performance (sensitivity) for surveillance testing versus diagnostic testing?

It would not be the state's intention to purposefully accept a lower sensitivity for surveillance tests versus diagnostic tests. Rather, our shared goal is to select tests that are sensitive and specific enough to identify cases within the testing algorithm(s) of this program.

38. Should individuals who have previously tested positive for COVID-19 be included in pools?

No, individuals who have previously tested positive (on an individual, not pooled, test) in the past 90 days should be excluded. After 90 days, they should be included again in the pools.

39. Should vaccinated staff participate in pooled testing?

We encourage teachers and staff to participate in the testing even if they have already been fully vaccinated, though it is not required. There are several reasons why vaccinated staff should participate in pooled testing, including: While each vaccine authorized by the FDA is effective at preventing symptomatic infection, no vaccine is 100% effective. Vaccinated individuals may still get COVID-19 and transmit it to others.

Our knowledge of vaccinated transmission is evolving. Recent evidence suggests that fully vaccinated individuals may be just as likely to transmit the virus to others as unvaccinated individuals.

40. If a fully vaccinated individual is part of a positive pool, do they need to have a negative test before returning to school/work?

No. As with all individuals in a positive pool, a fully vaccinated individual who is part of a positive pool should follow DHHS/DOE's recommended protocols, which includes receiving a follow-up/reflex test (either BinaxNOW) but it is not necessary for that person to stay out of work (i.e., quarantine) before taking the follow-up test. The Maine Center for Disease Control (ME CDC) endorses its use in follow-up testing.

41. What are the options if BinaxNOW tests for positive pool members are all negative?

If this occurs, schools will conduct a second BinaxNOW test on all individuals no sooner than the next day, but within 2 days. If those tests are all negative, then the school would proceed with the next round of scheduled pooled PCR testing. Members of a positive pool do not have to quarantine prior to receiving the results of their follow-up tests, unless they are symptomatic. Similarly, household contacts of individuals in a positive pool do not need to quarantine, unless the individual is confirmed to have COVID-19 through follow-up testing.

Testing Operations

42. How will pooled testing training be conducted?

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The Pooled Testing Provider will provide training to staff to administer tests as well as how to observe sample collection. This training will also include information on how to track samples in each pool, use the software, and deliver samples to the laboratory.

43. Can tests be given at home?

At this time, the pooled testing options associated with this initiative cannot be conducted at home. Pooled tests should occur in school and be administered or supervised by trained staff.

44. Do families need to complete consent forms each week a pooled test is conducted?

No. Staff and parent/guardian consent forms only need to be completed once a year (12 months) for participation in the program. These forms must provide consent to participate in pooled testing consent for any necessary follow-up tests, including administering and reporting Abbott BinaxNOW tests.

45. Do students and staff need to quarantine until the pool test results are returned?

Pooled testing provides surveillance testing capabilities to schools, meaning that students and staff exposed at school and participating in the pooled PCR testing program do not have to quarantine from school activities if they have been identified as a close contact. These individuals should remain in school and continue to participate in the weekly pooled PCR testing program while quarantining in the community. However, any unvaccinated student or staff member not participating in pooled PCR testing program or unwilling to get follow-up BinaxNOW testing as part of a positive pool and identified as a close contact of a confirmed case will need to quarantine for 10 days. Fully vaccinated students or staff not participating in the pooled PCR testing program who are identified as a close contact do not need to quarantine; however, they should receive a COVID-19 test 5-7 days after exposure which can be an antigen test such as BinaxNow test.

46. Why do we only quarantine unvaccinated children and adults identified as close contacts who do not participate in the testing program?

Individuals participating in the testing program are tested every week with a PCR test, which allows the school to monitor those individuals closely, even after they have been identified as a close contact. In other words, the individuals in the testing program are under surveillance. The PCR test also provides the opportunity to catch the virus at low levels in an asymptomatic individual. The participating school has no way to monitor those not participating in weekly testing; therefore, they need to quarantine. Pool participant close contacts need to quarantine in the community even though they are exempted from school-based quarantine.

47. Can a parent of a child not participating in the testing program have their child tested to get out of quarantine and return to school?

A school should not accept a one-time test to get out of quarantine. Testing options vary and some may seek molecular or lateral flow types of tests, which are not as sensitive as PCR in detecting COVID-19. Additionally, the student placed in quarantine was not tested at the time the positive case was identified, nor would they be tested each week moving forward; thus, a one-time test is not helpful in monitoring the student.

It is possible that individuals who had COVID-19 (knowingly or unknowingly) but are no longer contagious will cause some pooled tests to come back positive, and every test has a chance of false positives. Symptomatic students should not attend school and should follow the school's procedure.

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48. If a school wants to decrease the spacing between students as a benefit of the program, does the entire district need to meet the 30% participation threshold?

Distancing in schools is not tied to participation rates in pooled testing at this time. Distancing is a strategy that can be used by schools, and is encouraged whenever possible, but should not limit in-person learning or the ability for schools to provide in-person instruction and services.

49. If we use Abbott BinaxNOW for follow-up testing, can we also use it for symptomatic testing?

Yes. Schools may find guidance on the use of BinaxNOW in the school setting [here](#), as well instructions for obtaining consent for symptomatic BinaxNOW testing and ordering additional BinaxNOW tests [here](#). The [sample consent form for BinaxNOW](#) has been updated to include all uses approved for the K-12 setting. Please note, this consent form does not include consent for pooled PCR testing.

50. If Abbott BinaxNOW is used for follow-up testing, will the Abbott BinaxNOW tests continue to be provided free to schools for other use cases as outlined in the ME DHHS BinaxNOW Testing Guidance for Schools?

Yes. The state intends to provide the Abbott BinaxNOW tests for follow-up testing and any of the other approved use cases as outlined in guidance. This is dependent on sufficient supply from Abbott, but currently the state does not foresee any supply constraints.

51. If a school enrolls in the pooled testing program and uses Abbott BinaxNOW for follow-up testing, can they also use them for symptomatic testing if they had not previously signed up for the existing Abbott BinaxNOW DHHS program for children/staff who become symptomatic in school?

Yes. Schools and SAUs can use the Abbott BinaxNOW for either or both purposes (symptomatic testing and follow-up testing for positive pools).

52. Does the state have a required turn-around time for Pooled Testing Program results for vendors who are participating in the pooled testing?

Yes. The Testing Service Provider will be required to deliver pooled testing results to the school by 4:00PM (local time, Augusta, Maine) two calendar days from the date the samples were picked up for shipment from the Authorized School by FedEx or courier. Many times, results will be returned in approximately 24 hours.

Program Reporting

53. Will positive follow up BinaxNOW tests count toward the state confirmed counts if they are not PCR tested?

Yes. The BinaxNOW test results do count in the total case numbers for Maine. They are counted as probable cases. However, as a reminder, the US CDC guidance for opening outbreaks requires a PCR or a NAAT. A school needs 3 PCR/NAAT tests in 14 days from different households to open an outbreak. All positive antigen tests from the 14 days of the 3 PCR/NAAT are probable cases and are counted in the outbreak once it is opened. Antigen tests alone will not open an outbreak based on Federal CDC surveillance guidance. Therefore, we strongly encourage at least the first three positive antigen tests to be sent for confirmatory PCR testing. Schools should identify [places](#) to direct individuals for confirmatory PCR testing within 24-48 hours of the initial BinaxNOW test.

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54. Should SAUs and Private schools report the number of individuals in negative pools to improve the accuracy of the “percent positivity” metrics for each community?

No. At this time, DHHS does not require results of pooled surveillance tests to be reported to the department. Only the individual-level follow-up tests (diagnostic) are required to be reported to the state all positive, negative, and inconclusive.

Other Questions

55. What is the difference between Maine's K-12 Pooled Testing Program and the U.S. Health & Human Services Operation Expanded Testing (OET) program?

The HHS Operation Expanded Testing is different than the Maine K-12 Pooled Testing program, even though they both offer pooled testing to schools. The Maine program is managed by the State of Maine, whereas Operation Expanded Testing is managed by Eurofins/Affinity through the federal government.

Both programs are free; however, unlike the HHS program, the Maine program provides on-site clinical and administrative supports for schools. Maine Department of Education cannot provide operational guidance to schools that may choose to enroll in the HHS program. OET has a particular focus on equity, and can provide pooled testing to other types of organizations, such as homeless shelters and congregate care settings. OET and the Maine program have different funding timelines, with Maine's program funded to 6/30/2022.

Parent/Community Questions

56. Why do we only quarantine unvaccinated children and adults identified as close contacts who do not participate in the testing program?

Individuals participating in the testing program are tested every week with a PCR test, which allows the school to monitor those individuals closely, even after they have been identified as a close contact. In other words, the individuals in the testing program are under surveillance. The PCR test also provides the opportunity to catch the virus at low levels in an asymptomatic individual. The participating school has no way to monitor those not participating in weekly testing; therefore, they need to be quarantined.

57. What are the benefits of screening testing when children are now being vaccinated?

While we are encouraged those children 12 years and older are now eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine, there remain the following concerns, which should be considered:

- While children 12 and older are eligible to be vaccinated, there are many families that are hesitant or concerned about vaccinating their child, which will delay any herd immunity among children 12 and older.
- Children under the age of 12 are not currently eligible for COVID-19 vaccine.
- It takes 5 weeks to reach full protection from vaccination, so it will take time before every child is vaccinated and gains full protection.
- While we know vaccines are highly effective, there are cases of “break-through” COVID-19, or cases of COVID-19 in individuals who are fully vaccinated. These cases could impact other people, including unvaccinated or immunocompromised children and adults.
- There are growing number of variants impacting parts of the world, including the United States. We are learning more about these variants every day, but regular testing may be one way to detect these variants before they spread.
- The pooled test is a Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test, which is considered the “gold standard” of COVID-19 testing. It can detect the virus at incredibly low levels, catching COVID-19 in asymptomatic individuals before they become symptomatic or infectious.¹ (Go to link above for graph)

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- Pooled PCR testing can be viewed as another tool, along with masking, handwashing, and isolating symptomatic individuals, to keep communities safe, reduce transmission, and build confidence that it's safe to go to school.

Benefits to Pooled Testing

- Children participating can stay in school
- Parents can go to work rather than stay home with quarantined children
- School staff can continue their incredibly important work of educating
- Builds confidence in knowing the level of transmission in school
- Allows the school to be knowledgeable of and ready for COVID-19 surges

58. Can staff and students be required to participate in pooled testing?

No. Participation in pooled testing is voluntary. Students who do not participate cannot be barred from in-person learning opportunities solely because they do not participate, however those not participating in the program who are identified as close contacts will need to quarantine and be out of school for that period of time.

59. What staff are eligible to participate in the pooled testing program?

All SAU and private school employees or individuals employed by the organization are eligible to participate in the pooled testing program, including those that may already be vaccinated. Additionally, contracted staff such as bus drivers, are also eligible for participation. At this time, staff that work outside of the school are not eligible to participate.

60. Is pooled testing an effective strategy in areas with low transmission rates?

Yes. Pooled testing is an effective strategy in areas with low transmission. With lower COVID-19 rates, there may be fewer follow-up tests. This can increase staff and community confidence in returning to school while incurring much lower costs than individual testing.

61. How often will my child be tested?

Pool testing should be done on individuals once per week.

62. Can tests be given at home?

At this time, the pooled testing options associated with this initiative cannot be conducted at home. Pooled tests should occur in school and be administered or supervised by trained staff.

63. Do students and staff need to quarantine until the pool test results are returned?

Pooled testing provides surveillance testing capabilities to schools, meaning that students and staff participating in the pooled PCR testing program do not have to quarantine if they have been identified as a close contact. These individuals should remain in school and continue to participate in the weekly pooled PCR testing program. However, any unvaccinated student or staff member not participating in pooled PCR testing Program or unwilling to get follow-up BinaxNOW testing as part of a positive pool and identified as a close contact of a confirmed case will need to quarantine for 10 days.

64. Can a parent of a child not participating in the testing program have their child tested to get out of quarantine and return to school?

A school should not accept a one-time test to get out of quarantine. Testing options vary and some may seek molecular or lateral flow types of tests, which are not as sensitive as PCR in detecting COVID-19. Additionally, the student placed in quarantine was not tested at the time the positive case was identified, nor would they be tested each week moving forward; thus, a one-time test is not helpful in monitoring the student.

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65. Should household members of individuals in a positive pool be considered “possibly exposed” while waiting for follow-up testing to be completed?

No. Members of a positive pool do not have to quarantine prior to receiving the results of their follow-up tests unless they are symptomatic. Similarly, household contacts of individuals in a positive pool do not need to quarantine, unless the individual is confirmed to have COVID-19 through follow-up testing. Individuals or close contacts of individuals who do receive a positive follow-up test result should follow the Standard Operating Procedure Investigating Positive Cases for COVID-19 in Schools.

66. If a K-12 pooled testing participant is identified as a close contact and is exempt from quarantine for in-person learning and school activities, can they still participate in community programs, including those hosted in the school building and/or using school staff?

No, a student that participates in the pooled testing program that is identified as a close contact of a confirmed case is quarantined from all non-school sponsored activities, including childcare, community recreation programs and club sports. The quarantine exemption only applies to in-person learning and school sponsored activities.

67. If a K-12 pooled testing participant is exposed to COVID-19 in the community setting (childcare facility, community recreation program, church, or club sports) and are identified as a close contact, can they return to school for in-person learning only?

No, the quarantine exemption only applies to students or staff identified as a close contact through the weekly pooled testing program or school-sponsored activity. It does not extend to community exposures.

68. What if a student or staff misses a pooled testing day?

If they are considered a close contact, they should be tested twice when they return (separate days) using an antigen test (BinaxNOW) and then resume their normal pool schedule if the results are negative. If they are not identified as a close contact, they should just resume pooled testing the following week.

69. When a student identified as a close contact attends both a high school and a technical school (regional technical program) can they continue to attend the program or their high school if they are participating in pooled testing?

If the location of exposure was the technical school, it has a pooled testing program, and the close contact is a current pooled testing participant, then they may continue to attend the technical school so long as they remain asymptomatic. If the location of the exposure was the high school or other high school activity, it has a pooled testing program, and the person is a current pooled testing participant, then they may continue to attend their high school (and activities) so long as they remain asymptomatic. They cannot attend the “other” school as they are two different schools, even if they are both doing pooled testing. That means they offer two settings for exposure, so that exposure at one, along with any quarantine mitigation applying from that exposure, cannot apply to the other location. This is different than for "school-based activities" and extracurricular activities, because those more reliably occur among the same population that is pool testing.